



For The Inquirer / JIM ROESE

His studio at Haverford College has both a Taos Pueblo drum (left) and a piano. Curtis Cacioppo, to be honored in New York, has composed such disparate pieces as "Snake Dance," and "Tuscan Folio."

Notes of native drums, Tuscan views

The award-winning Haverford musician is deemed one "who has found his voice."

By Ralph Vigoda
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Haverford — Curtis Cacioppo has a distinct voice, but he doesn't have to open his mouth to demonstrate it.

He just has to play.

A pianist, composer, and music professor at Haverford College, he has spent years creating music based on two seemingly disparate sources: his fascination with Native American culture and his Italian heritage.

Next month, he will be recognized for his work with a lifetime achieve-

ment award from the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York. One of four composers to receive the award this year, Cacioppo was selected after being invited to submit two original scores for consideration by the selection committee. Previous winners have included Leonard Bernstein, Gian Carlo Menotti and William Schuman.

In deciding who gets the award, the academy looks for a composer "who has found his voice."

"Voice has to do with how you think,

how you express yourself on a purely musical level," said Cacioppo, 45, who has been at Haverford since 1983. "I don't know if I could describe it. It has to do with my imagination and my mode of working, how I put notes together, how I see possibilities for development of ideas."

The award comes with a \$15,000 prize, half of which is to be used for recording one of the artist's compositions. That's exciting for Cacioppo, who thus far has had one work, *Wolf*, included on a compact disc compilation.

His music has been commissioned and performed by orchestras including the Chicago and Milwaukee sym-

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THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

Music of native drums and Tuscan vistas

MUSICIAN from MD1
phonies. A piece called *Nayenezgani*, meaning "Monsterslayer," recently had its premiere by the Emerson String Quartet in collaboration with the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society.

His works have been played in Paris, Munich, Moscow and Helsinki.

"I've been very much affected by knowledge and contact with Native American music and beliefs," Cacioppo said. "On the other side, I have my Italian background and spent time in Italy. I've been profoundly affected by that."

Cacioppo grew up in Ohio in the 1950s and 1960s. "In that day," he said, "the Lone Ranger was on TV with his faithful Indian companion. But that was a very false and stereotypical image of Native Americans. I was always fascinated with what the Native American world really might be."

He attended Kent State at a time — 1969-73 — of sociopolitical upheaval.

There, Cacioppo was deeply affected by the book *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* by Dee Brown, which recounts the historic plight of Native Americans at the hands of the U.S. government. He became a fan of the music of Buffy St. Marie, a Native American folksinger. One line from a song of hers, he said, has always stuck in his conscience: "Our American history books fail to tell the tale of the genocide basic to this country's birth."

It wasn't until later, when he was pursuing his doctorate at Harvard and mingled with tribes native to New England, that he became heavily involved in Native American issues.

That involvement was "mainly from a social and political point of view," he said. "The musical point of view naturally followed."

One of his pieces, *Snake Dance*, was inspired by a Hopi ceremony. *Nayenezgani* was based on a Navajo creation story. *Wolf* is set to a Mohawk poem.

"There are over 500 distinct tribes in the United States," he said. "They all have traditions and beliefs and stories. If I had to generalize, you could say the greatest percentage of Native American music, in its traditional form, was not notated. It avoided any kind of theoretical formalization. The concepts of scales and chords and meters don't apply. It's an oral tradition."

The music, he said, is usually composed of one melodic line, which might be sung by an individual or by many in unison. Accompaniment is rarely more than a drum — of which there are a variety — or a rattle.

"The drum carries the pulse and the voice carries a melody," he said. "There is a whole repertoire of songs that are ceremonial, and another that are social or secular. And there's a category that could be called personal songs. It's just a tremendous variety."

Cacioppo writes mainly for western orchestral instruments.

"A lot of piano because I'm a pianist," he said. "But I incorporate a lot of drumming effects in piano music, hopefully in a way that's not trite or obvious."

One of his pieces, *Invocation and Dance of the Mountain Gods*, uses Iroquois rattles and a crossbar drum.

Once, to capture a Native American singing style, he had a violinist slide from note to note in a particular way to emulate a specific vocal technique.

When he is not using Native American traditions for inspiration, he turns to his Italian background, from it have sprung such compositions as *Tuscan Folio*, *Sonata Transfigurata* and *Poems from Paternina*.

Cacioppo, who also teaches a social justice course at Haverford that focuses on the legacy of mistreatment of Native Americans, is not the only musician in the family. His wife is a piano teacher.